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TAGS: MOPS MARR PREL PTER RP

SUBJECT: FURTHER PROGRESS IN COUNTERTERRORISM SCENARIO

STAFF TALKS

REF: MANILA 286

Classified By: (U) Political Officer Paul O'Friel  
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

**¶11. (C) SUMMARY.** The second in a series of USG-GRP staff talks on the development of counterterrorism cooperation scenarios produced progress, with a notable "climate change" on the RP side in the wake of the February 14 terrorist bombings in Manila and Mindanao. The two sides reached consensus on a maritime and land scenario, and will focus on developing detailed mission analyses in the next round of talks, scheduled for mid-March. END SUMMARY.

**¶12. (C)** February 21-25 counterterrorism scenario discussions between US Pacific Command and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Department of National Defense (DND) staff counterparts built upon January 12-14 working-level meetings (reftel). Leaving aside -- for the moment -- the legalistic concerns of the earlier session, the thirty-plus GRP participants -- ranging from DND Undersecretary for Policy Antonio Santos to the AFP "J" and service staffs -- came fully prepared and ready to focus on practical maritime and land scenarios. Acknowledging the impact of the February 14 terrorist bombings on his government, DND Assistant Secretary for Policy Melchor admitted, "the climate has

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changed."

**¶13. (C)** In identifying realistic options, the USPACOM and GRP staffers developed a matrix that listed: activities both sides considered "legal" and acceptable; activities that the AFP considered "borderline," but still feasible; and, activities that would "test" the limits for either the USG or GRP, e.g., Filipino pilots flying US aircraft or US aircraft flying close air support for Filipino forces.

**¶14. (C)** Philippine Navy and Marine officers discussed in detail the concept of an "operational box" in the AFP's Southern Command area of Mindanao, out of which US Navy elements could stage for combined operations with Filipino units in Philippine national waters. Undersecretary Santos separately commented toward the end of the discussions that this realistic examination of legalities, training resources, and popular perceptions demonstrated that the United States and the Philippines had "come a long way in three years." However, Philippine Navy participants expressed concern about the legality of any maritime scenario unless both sides clearly defined and agreed upon the nature and extent of Philippine territorial waters.

**¶15. (C)** Looking ahead, both sides agreed the next step is to develop detailed mission analyses for the maritime and land scenarios. The DND suggested participation in future talks should broaden to include the Philippine Coast Guard and the Philippine National Police. Undersecretary Santos also advocated development of a information campaign to educate public opinion about USG counterterrorism support for the Philippines. He noted public opinion surveys indicated that 80-percent of the Philippine population supported the USG presence and help with GRP counterterrorism efforts. The information campaign would have to address the vocal 20-percent minority, as well as pockets of resistance even within the AFP, he noted.

**¶16. (C) COMMENT.** We are encouraged by the progress in the counterterrorism development talks and attribute much of the success to the leadership of Secretary of National Defense Cruz, who appears to have given clear direction to his team of where to go. However, the devil will be in the details. The "legal" questions are sure to resurface in the near future, and we do not discount the power of bureaucratic inertia and latent misplaced nationalistic sentiment to derail any consensus, at least temporarily.